



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Shame (Skammen) by Ingmar Bergman
Ernest Callenbach

Film Quarterly, Vol. 23, No. 1. (Autumn, 1969), pp. 32-34.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-1386%28196923%2923%3A1%3C32%3AS%28%3E2.0.CO%3B2-X>

Film Quarterly is currently published by University of California Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

length away from them, and there is some paint pointlessly daubed around the trees behind. The shot works in a way that close-ups of faces or symbolic (maybe) carrots, scenic indulgence or nervous cutting could not have. Since at this point in the film we are almost totally unacquainted with the two of them, we identify, not with the personal tension, but with the uneasiness of the situation as a whole, as evidenced only by the way they look and what they're saying. To focus the situation or even to give it too much visual significance would have been self-defeating, for our attention and consciousness would then be drawn to the couple themselves, rather than to their place in the work as a whole. It is cinematic indirection of the highest order.

This, Lapoujade's first feature, represents both a nice extension of and reaction to where movies, particularly the French cinema, have been going lately. In a way it is the first post-Godardian French film to use such techniques and content for ends quite distinct from the master's. In its deliberately artificial, dry, hermetic, sometimes even cute look, it becomes an appealing alternative to the sombre Utrillo cityscapes, cool Matisse interiors, and pretty Renoir countrysides which provide backdrops for those bunches of grubby, semi-intellectual, semi-Bohemian characters who wander around so much of the French-influenced cinema today. Even the music is a refreshing change from the plunk-plunk Delerue and Legrand scores which make me want to stop up my ears every time they start tinkling away—not because they weren't a refreshing change from the excesses of Max Steiner or Maurice Jarre at the time, but because their simplicity has lapsed into simple affectation. Bernard Palmegiani's music for *Le Socrate* seems in this context a model of invention, slipping gracefully from abstract electronic sounds to recognizable instrumental pop-tunish figures.

What is more, however, *Le Socrate* is a movie that seeks out its own form, a movie which doesn't look for solutions to cinematic problems in other films, but goes back to the

nature of visual and mental processes themselves, avoiding the tendency which threatens to turn film-making into a kind of visual song-writing, an art which, for all its ability to move and be beautiful, becomes dependent on its conventions in order to define itself.

—GEORGE LELLIS

SHAME

(Skammen) Director: Ingmar Bergman. Script: Bergman. Photography: Sven Nykvist. United Artists.

With *Shame* Bergman returns to the territory of *The Seventh Seal*, his first international triumph in the cinema: a world swept by chronic senseless wars, in which sensitive men are battered and even cynical men cannot thrive. Von Sydow and Björnstrand reappear—older now, tired, still more lost. The figure of faith in *Seventh Seal*, the radiant Bibi Andersson, has vanished; in her place is the earthier Liv Ullmann, playing a musician who reveals a peasant endurance, but whose grace has been destroyed by the end of the film.

In a way *Shame* is a disappointment. *Persona* was a dazzlingly subtle work that seemed to open up new, disquieting, intriguing avenues for Bergman, refining the harsh observational austerities of *The Silence* and the other "chamber films" with a contemporary, self-conscious ambiguity of point-of-view, yet incorporating Bergman's usual richness of psychological nuance. *Hour of the Wolf*, it seems to me, was an over-reaching from *Persona*, a stylistic extension which did not work. The earlier film, whether you interpret it largely "objectively," or as a drama entirely within one psyche, or as a projection from Alma's perspective or Elisabeth's, is at any rate a film that *can* be felt and considered as a coherent work, visually and psychologically. (I'm inclined to think it's Alma's film.) But *Hour of the Wolf* cannot be contained within any one coherent point-of-view; its structural problem is insoluble. Each character evidently perceives the fantasies of the other, and the camera for its part sees the

REVIEWS

characters within their fantasies as well as at other times; but the film never lets on how we are seeing all these things. (The device of the diary would only work in a novel). And I find it impossible to argue, like one imperturbable friend, that there's nothing wrong with a film just because it's insane. I think that, in the disbalances of *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergmann was paying some of the immense psychological price that must be exacted for working so near the line between sanity and madness; of all directors, he is the most personally brave in the sense of being willing to work with dangerous psychic material—to dredge, as he himself once said, down into the primitive levels of infancy where we are all frighteningly psychotic.

Shame returns nearer the surface again; it is safer, less daring. The photography is almost documentary, with a grey neutral light even in interiors; none of the strangeness of *Persona*, or the expressionism of *Hour of the Wolf*. There are many long takes, and some of them were evidently unscripted although carefully planned—a very startling development for Bergman. In the years since *Seventh Seal*, a great deal of excess stylistic baggage has been abandoned. There are no “ideas” in *Shame*. Except perhaps for the last shot, the film would make sense without its sound track. Indeed, much of what the characters say does not really make much sense anyway. Bergman has long abandoned the role of the Great Dubber, who used to put into his characters’ mouths important thoughts about God, life, and the loneliness of man in an inscrutable universe. His characters now nag fiercely at each other; the mild, wishy-washy husband proves capable of bestial physical cruelty quite outside the psychological repertoire of *The Seventh Seal*, where evil was a metaphysical abstraction and Death a symbolic figure in a theatrical black cloak.

This is not only a political development. The film does take place during a war which is vaguely like Vietnam but in a fairly precise Swedish context. (There are invaders with frightening technology, and guerrillas in the woods sympathetic to them; the old govern-



SHAME

ment recaptures the territory, executes some collaborators, and in a terrifying but not bloodthirsty way re-establishes itself, perhaps not for long. The war has evidently been going on for years, and the central characters, both former musicians, have retreated to an island for safety.) But the idea that the world is hell is hardly new for Bergman. *Shame* chiefly adds military and political aspects to the emotional, theological, social, and sexual hells of his earlier films.

I have never personally been caught up in war or paramilitary actions (except as Berkeley citizens have observed the latter recently) but *Shame* seems bloodcurdlingly effective on this level, and in a way more humanly affecting than the super-terror of *The War Game*. The swooping planes, sudden haphazard destruction, and above all the sense of being unable to tell what is happening beyond one's immediate sight range, seem to me a convincing portrait of what “small wars” are like for civilians. Only the drive among the flames has any feel of contrived “special effects.”

Shame is in fact quite remarkable among war films, and takes its place among a tiny honorable handful that may be considered genuinely antiwar. The usual “antiwar” film gains its laurels by including a certain amount of obviously senseless gore and destruction. It may even allege conscious or unconscious villainy on the part of war-makers, like Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*. But the battle scenes prove to have a purposeful choreographic grace and power

lacking in the rest of the movie (or indeed in most movies). War may be hell, but it sure does give the camera something to photograph! More subtly, war films almost universally provide an artificial and reassuring orientation to what is happening, both through dramatic devices and dialogue and through the elementary tactics of coherent screen movement (especially having one army move to the right and the other to the left). Whatever the script may say, battles on film thus are given *visual* sense. But *Shame's* war scenes, like the documentary Vietnam footage in *The Anderson Platoon*, but closer up, never make visual sense. If we found ourselves magically transported, like Keaton's little projectionist, suddenly catapulted into *Shame*, we wouldn't have the faintest idea what to do: which way to run, where to hide. We would be, in other words, in exactly the position of a Vietnamese peasant upon whose village the B-52s, too high for the eye to see, are raining bombs in a carefully computerized random pattern.

Naturally enough, this aspect of the film is enormously depressing, and doubtless it largely accounts for the film not proving popular—though it is also true that it lacks jazzed-up sex scenes. In the long run, it will probably seem the film's greatest achievement. For there *are* defects in the characterization and plot structure. The initial relationship between the rather childish husband and the wholesome wife is convincing, as is her seduction, in its dolorous way; and we may accept the immediate murderous aftermath as a particularly violent Nordic *crime passionnel*. (It is a little reminiscent of *Virgin Spring*.) But thereafter Von Sydow seems to have gone berserk, utterly and totally. This might have been made emotionally credible in a film with another tone; but the whole last part of the film leaves us asking awkward literal questions that should not have been allowed to arise: Why do they decide to return to the presumably even more hazardous mainland? Why, in the final scene when they drift at sea among the corpses, do all the bodies float so magically together? And why do the people in the boat not rig a sail?

Thus the power the ending should have had is somehow diffused. The boat is adrift, its people apparently doomed to starvation. When all possibilities of action in the outside world have been blocked or made senseless, human beings turn inward; they curl and die. The wife can only recount her dreams. This reaction of humanity to the utterly monstrous, the unbearable, is perhaps what Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* calls "the horror." To Bergman it is the shame of modern man. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

GOODBYE, COLUMBUS

Director: Larry Peerce. Producer: Stanley Jaffe. Script: Arnold Schulman, based on the novella by Philip Roth. Photography: Gerald Hirschfield. Music: The Association. Paramount.

You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy *Goodbye, Columbus* (though it helps), but you do have to be old enough to have strong memories of what it felt like to live through the swollen Fabulous Fifties. For it is as a very specific social document that the film first impresses one—the story of a poor Jewish boy from the Bronx, a forerunner of today's dropouts, who has a summer romance with an upper-middle-class girl from Westchester. The differences in their background turn them on to each other—Neil is attracted to Brenda largely because of the exotic glitter of her *nouveau riche* world, while she is attracted to him because he is outside that world and therefore can be used to bait her snobbish parents. And it is this same class difference that ultimately separates them—the romance ends when Neil realizes that he can never belong to Brenda's world and that she can never escape it. Philip Roth's novella has even been read as a fifties-style satiric analogue to *An American Tragedy* or *The Great Gatsby*. The ethnic humor is really only incidental; the novella's main achievement is its brilliant, exact dissection of affluent Eisenhower America.

But Roth published his satire ten years ago; what relevance can the film—a fairly faithful